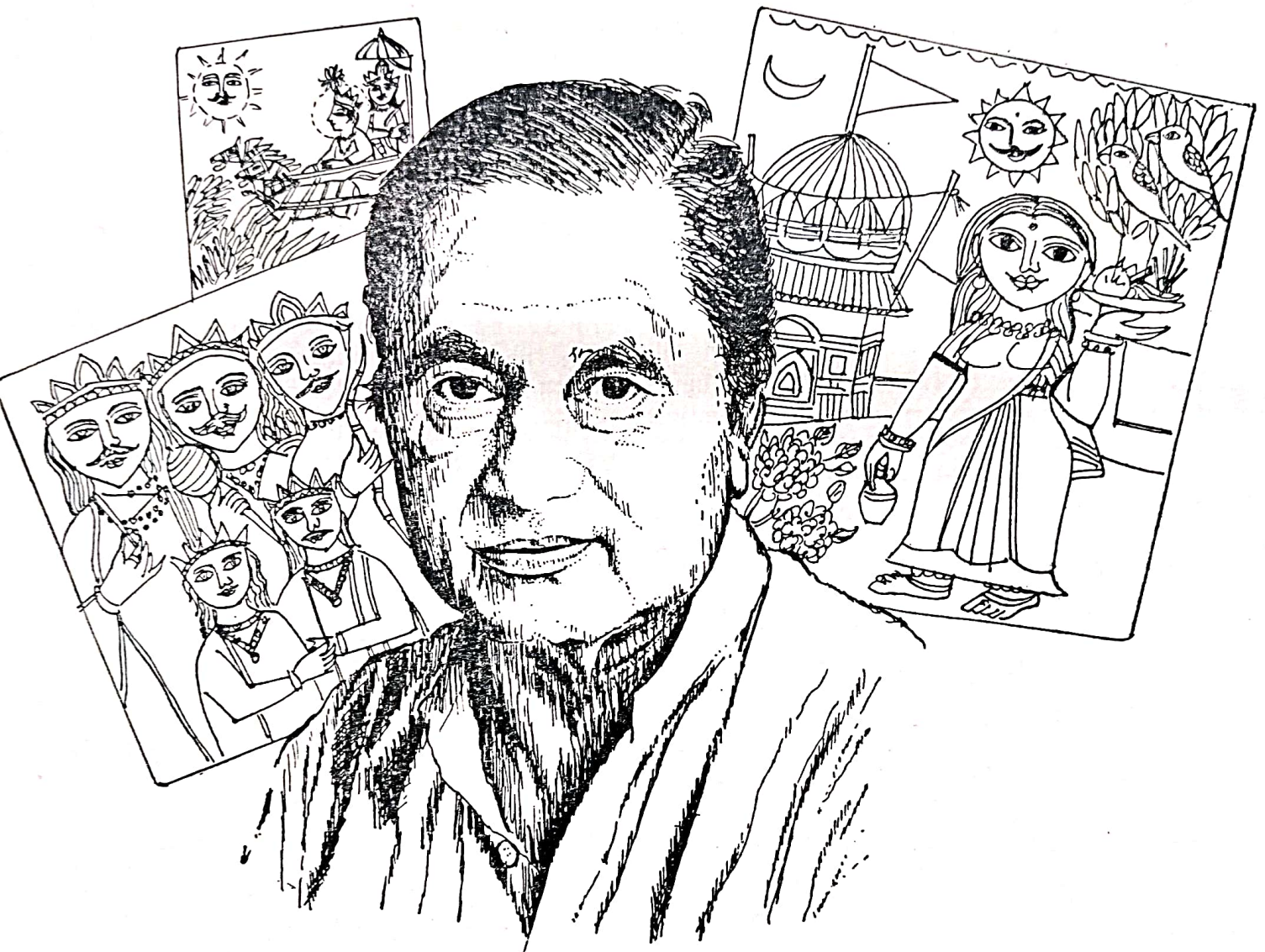


Profile—BADRI NARAYAN—THE MAN WITH A MAGIC BRUSH



—JAYA PARAMASIVAN

ILLUSTRATED BY—SAHANA PAL

“No other hobby. In fact, I don’t much approve of a hobby,” this forthright answer was from Badri Narayan, a recipient of Padma Shri, and one of the senior artists of our country, who is internationally renowned and whose special forte is illustrating for children. He is one of the few

Indian artists whose style of painting is based on indigenous imagery.

Badri Narayan was born on 22nd July, 1929, at Secunderabad in Andhra Pradesh. As a child, he listened with interest to stories told by his maternal grandmother and others. All these were stored in his memory

and was later expressed in his paintings. He was inspired as a teen-ager by the paintings on the walls of small shrines and temples at Secunderabad. The influence of the brilliantly coloured figures of deities on whitewashed walls is apparent in his work even today. The bright and warm colours in those vivid paintings—browns and greens—seem to spring straight from earth. Badri Narayan had no formal training in art and learnt the technique through trial and error method and through reading.

Badri Narayan has participated in more than forty exhibitions at home as well as abroad since 1949. He has also held nearly forty one-man exhibitions to date, in all the major cities in India. His works have been exhibited in various major cities across the length and breath of the world, including prestigious galleries in Europe, United States, South America, Japan, Australia and the U.S.S.R. Over the years, he has perfected his technique. His paintings have a touch of fantasy, dream, and generally have mythical content. Each painting stands by itself and triggers off the imagination of the viewer.

Badri Narayan's stylized figures transcend their mundane lives. "Their gigantic almond eyes are the windows of their souls" and their souls are pure. The placid expression in the eyes of his men and women produce a tranquil psychological effect. The art critic Nadkarni comments, "The men that Badri paints with long shaped beards seem like images from Persian illuminated paintings. The animals in his paintings are as much a dramatic character as the human beings."

More often than not, Badri Narayan's symbols bear a trail of traditional evocation. Symbols from folklore and myth fuse meaningfully in making the paintings look exclusive. His paintings are mostly based on an entire corpus of myths, legends and particularly tales from the Buddhist-Jataka relating to former births of Lord Buddha.

"My inspiration came from folklore," admits Narayan, "but finally, the paintings have very little relation with the actual myths." Viewing some of his recent works one observes the fantastic unicorns, kings, the common everyday couple at breakfast come alive vivid in decorative lines against a fiercely private vision. The down to earth simple picture of a village scene against a certain finesse of technique and colour comes alive.

Asked about a particular painting depicting a picture of a group, his answer was, "They are not going anywhere. They are sitting. That's all." That epitomises both the ordinary and daily commonality together into overpowering significance.

"It is a collective life I am leading," says Badri Narayan to an admirer of the pleasing, happy-looking decorative painting of Lord Ganesha. "I like to paint things that simple people like to look at and worship."

Badri Narayan has also specialized in ceramic art and has done print-making in woodcuts and engravings.

As Badri Narayan moves along the thematic lines, which characterise his work, we get an excellent product notable for texture and figurative compositions. Mythical animals, birds and fish crowd his tiles, and so do a variety of houses. They are all perennial things of beauty. In 1969, Badri Narayan had worked on ceramic tile murals and glass mosaic on glass panels for "Truth of God" Pavilion, Gandhi Darshan, New Delhi.

Badri Narayan got the inspiration to write for children from the stories he had heard in his childhood. These stories were published since 1956 in the Sunday edition in the children's pages, in the *Times of India*, *Sunday Standard* and the *Statesman*. Most of these stories carried his own illustrations. About his writing for children he says, "Naturally, the tales of the various provinces of India come more

alive to me, especially to recreate and retell. I have also made up my own stories for children."

He illustrated the first book for children for India Book House, Bombay in the "ECHO" book series in 1977, titled *Indian Mythological Heroines*. He wrote and illustrated *Jataka Tales* for Macmillan, India. In 1989, he had illustrated two books for pre-school children titled *The Elephant and the Dog* and *Find the Half Circle* which have been published by the National Book Trust, India.

His book *Find the Half Circle*, carries only illustrations. In it, he has drawn many simple pictures of everyday life like umbrella, basket, a face of a person etc. in attractive muted shades of colour, highlighting the "Half Circles" in each one of them, thus provoking young children's attention to observe objects around them.

Badri Narayan has also illustrated many children's books written by well-known authors. In 1983, he had illustrated, *Some Street Games of India*, written by Mulk Raj Anand, and published by the National Book Trust, India. In 1988, he had drawn illustrations for the book *Ramayana* for teenagers written by Lakshmi Lal, while reviewing one of Badri Narayan's books, A.S. Raman, the well-known art critic says, "Badri Narayan is known for his sincere and unpretentious work...he expresses himself creatively as best as he can. His images are strong and highly evocative. His figures, though decorative and stylized, are more presences than pictures."

It is no wonder then, that this artist has received innumerable awards in his glittering career spanning over so many years. He received his first award in 1949. He got his gold medal from the Hyderabad Art Society in 1962. He was awarded the Padma Shri in 1987.

Badri Narayan's desire to work for chil-

dren is seen by his early works since 1951 when he wrote articles on art, folklore, mythology, short stories, verses and tales for children which have appeared in both Indian and foreign press.

Since 1975, Badri Narayan has appeared on Bombay TV in children's programme many a times. He has conducted workshops and narrated stories to live audience of children in TV, organized children's camps, and also worked in the Institution for Juvenile Delinquent and the Handicapped Young. A natural story-teller, he is known to children as "Uncle Badri."

Badri Narayan has also painted and lent words for a short film "*Tasted Berries*" in 1971, for the Films Division, Government of India. The Bombay Doordarshan has made a short film on his works *Call it a Day* in 1975.

Besides the awards and prizes galore, he has received from prestigious Art Societies and Academics since 1949, his paintings have been occupying a place in the collections of 17 prestigious academies museums and art galleries.

Badri Narayan is married to a niece of the famed painter K.K. Hebber and has two daughters. He lives in Bombay.

As special Art Instructor of the Bombay International School for the last decade, Badri Narayan has moulded the colourful meanderings of the young, even as he communicates with them. In his view "no television, no film can take the place of a narrator," he asserts.

Asked what message he would like to give to budding artists, his succinct reply was, "Artists, whether budding or not, have to struggle hard today fending for themselves. Any support that comes is from within themselves."

Though basically an artist of adult paintings, Badri Narayan has made a significant contribution in the field by the striking charm of vibrant illustrations that delight the young.